

Lake Rotoiti

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The road from Tauranga to Te Puke was very hilly and rough and kept in bad repair. High forest ranges appeared on the right and much flat, swampy land on the left, between the road and the sea. After that it improved greatly as, for fifteen miles, we penetrated the most terrible looking country, a jumble of steep ridges and deep narrow gullies, all the more dreary looking as it was quite bare of forest and covered with a rusty growth of bracken. Glancing across at the neighboring mountain ridges similar to that on which our road had been made it seemed inconceivable to me that any men should have had the courage to make a road through such a country. Yet we spun along over a surface like a billiard table—of course at this season the road was at its best—round easy curves, and gradients not too steep. The country looked as rugged as the surface of the moon! There were no houses, cattle, sheep or living beings. In forty miles we met only one motor car, but I am told that deer are occasionally seen. It seemed to me that the only use to which such land can be put is afforestation—there must be thousands and thousands of acres. I never enjoyed a ride so much, sitting at my ease as we spun along a narrow ridge, the ground to the right dropping nearly perpendicularly to a narrow gorge several hundred feet below, then an easy twist of the admirable road, and we shot past a profound gulf on the left. I must compliment the engineers and the county council responsible for the making and upkeep of this road.

In the afternoon we sighted Lake Rotoiti, a lovely sheet of water ten miles long and shut in by steep forest-clad mountains. We skirted round for twenty miles.

passing that abomination of desolation, Tikitere, smelling foully of sulphur, an arid white scar on the beautiful green land, with its mud volcanoes, clouds of steam and pools of stagnant water. The latter part of the journey was very beautiful, the road having been cut across the face of jagged cliffs that descended to the water's edge, every crevice and fissure supporting a vigorous growth of tutu and konini bushes, small trees, palmleaf ferns, bracken, etc.

We stopped at a store to lay in a stock of provisions and had to await the leisurely attendance of a stately Maori damsel who also looked after the post office, telephone, telegraph, fishing licenses and the Lord knows how many other duties. After an interminable delay for vegetables one of the party brought in the encouraging intelligence that he had seen her sowing the carrot seed! But they were very confiding at this store, handing over to us a bill form with the request that we would fill it in and add up the total.

Hongi's track is very beautiful, majestic trees, against which the car almost brushes, towering up on each side of the road, which is made only wide enough for two motor cars to pass. There are very fine specimens of the wheki ponga (*Dicksonia fibrosa*) with its graceful plumed head; also the other three tree ferns, mamaku, wheki and ponga. I counted forty species of herbaceous ferns, including the beautiful New Zealand Davallia, but the filmy ferns were confined to three out of our twenty-one species. On the next day my daughter and I went for a seven-mile ride into the forest, perched on a locomotive tender piled up with firewood. It was very pleasant going out into the forest as the engine ran tender first, like an observation car without windows. The line, three feet six inch gauge, was well laid, sometimes up one in fifteen inclines and round amazingly sharp curves.

The engine, upright like a marine engine, with mitred gearing to the bogie axles, worked somewhat ponderously, but it negotiated difficulties an ordinary locomotive would not have looked at.

The felling, rimu, matai, and white pine, is nearly all done by Maori workmen, who are very clever with axe and saw. There are hauling engines in the forest which drag the logs with long wire cables on to the loading stages. The timber is delivered at the eastern end of Rotoiti, loaded on to a punt and towed ten miles across the lake to the saw mill. Mr. Wackrow and his employees were all most obliging and did everything to make our journey a pleasant one. I saw nothing very interesting in the fern line except a vigorous type of *Asplenium bulbiferum*, very open dark green fronds with black undersides to the stems and midribs.

In the afternoon we crossed the lake in a row boat. The mountains, covered with virgin forest, descended very steeply to the water's edge; the rocks, though perpendicular, in many places were covered with vegetation. Gazing up at the virgin forest covering the side of Mount Matawhaura, nearly 2,000 feet high and 1,000 feet above the lake, one could trace the course of a stream by a line of tall tree ferns. I am glad to say this forest is reserved, but the hills are so precipitous that they practically reserve themselves, which is fortunate, as much of the adjacent bush is being damaged by fallow deer. Why any one should introduce animals whose flesh is much inferior to beef or mutton passes my comprehension.

Here I was more fortunate with the ferns, adding the following to my collection round Rotoiti: *Asplenium Hookerianum* and var. *Colensoi*, *Trichomanes humile*, *elongatum* and *strictum*, *Polypodium australe*, and *Lindsaya Lessoni*. Next day we motored ten miles to Lake

Okataina. The road wound among forest-clad mountains. The quantity of ferns is incredible and cannot be conceived by those who have not seen them; they brush the sides of the car as you go by, the dense vegetation arching overhead until you travel in a subdued twilight most gratifying on a hot summer day.

Leaving my daughter and her husband to fish in the lake, I wandered back along this delightful road, adding four more ferns to my list, and making one of the discoveries of my life—*Botrychium ternatum* var. *dissectum*. It was on the ground, growing among a carpet of filmy ferns, a pure accident that such a blind bat as myself should have found it. I also got *Lomaria vulcanica*, for which I have been searching—the furthest north I have seen it.

I narrowly missed this find (*dissectum*). I had disobeyed orders to be at the lake punctually at 1 o'clock; but I could not resist the ferns and dawdled on, making short excursions into the bush on each side of the road. Five minutes after making my great discovery I heard the car tooting impatiently for me. Fortunately my daughter had walked up some of the side tracks in search of her truant father which delayed this arrival. I was so elated with my find that the scolding I got did not penetrate very deep. No one is so utterly selfish as the enthusiast, but, by way of expiation, I washed and put away all the tea things that evening while my daughter and her husband went out fishing.

To turn to another subject, I have invented a patent staircase by which, no doubt, some brainy architect will make a fortune. Our shack is on a shelf about sixteen feet above the lake. The soil, a soft pumice and volcanic ash, can be cut with a spade, like cheese. The water from the lake has to be carried up a steep incline; my job was to cut steps; there are about twenty. Learning

by experience that the upper steps were much harder to negotiate with a heavy load than the lower ones, I made the "lift" shallower and shallower as I went up. Thus, say the bottom step has a rise of twelve inches, I reduced each as I ascended by one-fourth inch until the top one had only an eight-inch rise. Thus, in an ordinary house staircase, the rise of the bottom step would be seven inches, and, decreasing each by one-eighth of an inch, the top step would have a rise of only five inches.

There are a good many Maoris at Rotoiti. Each day a charabanc passes piled up with school children—the government aid to native education. The children have been spoiled by tourists and are incorrigible beggars, but they were not long in finding out that we were a barren patch, and now leave us alone. On the first day a small boy volunteered his services as a guide into the bush—that is to say, I walked in front and he followed me. He suggested a *douceur* of "five bob," and when I laughed at once dropped to sixpence. I gave him twopence, which was exactly twopence more than he had earned in his half-hour stroll. The Maori ladies, like other daughters of Eve the world over, are slaves to fashion. A lady tourist living near the lake adopted "shorts" as the most convenient dress for the rough life of camping. The Maoris, thinking this the latest Paris fashion, at once "pinched" their husbands' pants and looked shyly pleased when I commented on their appearance.

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